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THE ROUND TABLE

THOUGHT ASSIGNMENTS

These two compositions are chosen from a number of almost equal merit written by Lilian Donaldson in the third-year class at Iola, Kansas. Miss Josephine Hoge, the teacher, has furnished this statement of the assignments:

"While studying the essay as a type of literature my students were asked to write letters to real people, to those who cared not at all for Lamb, or who mayhap knew nothing of him. The writer was to choose such details from *The Dissertation on Roast Pig*, *Dream Children*, and *Old China* as she thought would give the reader a desire to read the essays. Not the least important part of the assignment was for the writer to have an introduction and conclusion such as would naturally be put in a letter to a real friend.

"'Democracy in Kansas Poetry' was the result of an assignment which asked that the book *Sunflowers, a Book of Kansas Poems* by Willard Wattles, be read with the idea of discovering one phase of life running through a number of the poems."

519 EAST STREET
IOLA, KANSAS
March 22, 1919

DEAR FRANCIS:

It has seemed almost impossible to write sooner, but I managed to send the box which you asked for a week ago. It should have reached you by this time. I must tell you before I forget it that grandmother thinks you should write to Harris soon. You will remember that I wrote you about his accident.

We have been reading some essays by Charles Lamb at school recently. I can remember reading his *Tales from Shakespeare* when I was just a little girl. (Do you recall how we used to act them out?) I thought they were very interesting and when I had finished reading them I turned to the introduction in the hope of finding something about them. But it told about his essay *Dissertation upon Roast Pig*. I can remember how disgusted I was. If that essay ever came into my hands I wouldn't waste my time reading it. But I have changed my mind. Now I consider Lamb one of the most charming of the essayists. You must lay aside your novels and football stories for a while and read some of his works.

In his essay *Dream Children* he is telling his children, Alice and John, about their Grandmother Field "and how in her youth she was esteemed the best dancer—here little Alice's little right foot played an involuntary movement." In telling his story he never loses sight of the children at his knee. His description of the gardens surrounding his old home makes you feel almost as if you yourself were lying in the fresh grass, looking up at the orange trees or basking in the sun near the first or, perhaps, watching the fish darting to and fro at the bottom of the pond. When he tells of the death of brave, handsome Uncle John, the children weep and beg him to tell them of their pretty young mother for whom they wear mourning. As he begins to speak they fade away and he hears them whisper faintly, "We are nothing; less than nothing and dreams" and he awakes to find himself sitting by the fire. In this essay it is his tenderness that appeals to me and makes the essay, rather I should say Lamb himself, for we feel him near, so charming.

From *Dream Children* I turned to his *Dissertation upon Roast Pig*, an entirely different sort of essay. His topics are varied enough to suit even you. Here it is his light, graceful humor which delights me. He starts out by telling how the art of roasting young pig was discovered first in ancient China. I mustn't tell that part of the essay to you. You can appreciate it only by reading it yourself. I delight to believe that the art was really discovered by the method which Lamb describes.

He goes on to describe to the reader his own feelings for that dish, and it makes you almost wish that you were to have a pork roast for dinner. He says of roast pig about to be carved: "See him in the dish, his second cradle, how meek he lieth!—wouldst thou have had this innocent grow up to the grossness and indocility which too often accompanies maturer swinehood? Ten to one he would have proved a glutton, a sloven, an obstinate disagreeable animal—wallowing in all manner of filthy conversation. From these sins he is happily snatched away."

He mentions that our ancestors believed that it improved the flavor of the pig to whip it to death and recalls a debate among some students on the subject, "Whether, supposing that the flavor of a pig who obtained his death by whipping superadded a pleasure upon the palate of a man more intense than any possible suffering we can conceive in the animal, is the man justified in using this method of putting the animal to death?"

From such humorous fancifulness as this, one turns to his essay *Old China*. I think the variety of his topics, his wealth of ideas, is one of his chief charms. Now if in taking my advice to read some of Lamb's volumes you should come upon *Old China* don't pass it by with a masculine shrug for although his opening sentence is, "I have an almost feminine partiality for old china," it is not for long that he dwells upon teacups. It is in this essay that we get close to Charles Lamb himself, and he gets close to us. Here you find a young man and his cousin sitting in the gallery at the theater and losing their shame of

their seat in their interest in the play. Now they are rich and too proud to sit anywhere but in the pit. Were you never in their place? The essay is full of little human traits and of the pleasures of being "just above poverty."

Speaking of plays reminds me of the last picture show I saw. Mary Pickford played in *The Pride of the Clan*. In one place she saved a little kitten from being drowned and in another place she put her hat over a donkey's ear and using a monocle mocked a certain titled personage. Marjorie laughed so hard that people would surely have stared if they hadn't been busy laughing themselves.

I'm upstairs at my little old desk. The clock on top says five minutes after nine, and I must stop or I will not have any time in which to prepare to-morrow's French lesson. This letter is long enough anyway. The one pleasing thing about this flimsy paper is that I can write an exceedingly long letter and not have to pay three cents extra to send it to its destination. Please make your next letter as long as mine.

Your cousin,

LILIAN DONALDSON

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DEMOCRACY IN KANSAS POETRY

In reading for the first time *Sunflowers, a Book of Kansas Poems*, selected by Willard Wattles, the qualities of the poems which most impressed me were the love of the vast wind-swept prairies, the strength and cleanliness of manhood, and the hope in what the future will bring. The keynote of the book is Miss Esther M. Clark's *Call of Kansas*, which closes with the lines:

"O higher, clearer and stronger yet,
than the boom of the savage sea,
The voice of the prairie calling, calling me."

As I read the many poems on corn and the lines to the sunflower, "tawny and gold and brown," the fact that love of the Kansas soil was one of the big elements in Kansas poetry became more and more clear to me. Each poet seems to glory in the vast, free plains of "the land that God forgot" and which is now so full of smiling plenty. Willard Wattles in his poem, *Kansas*, longs for the "wind-swept Kansas prairie and golden seas of grain." The poets of Kansas truly love her plains.

But such a country must have a wonderful manhood strong and clean to conquer her wild unbroken prairies. Therefore I was not surprised to find that several of the poems are tributes to the wonderful courage and endurance of the early pioneers who were indeed forefathers of whom we may well be proud.

"We are young, but through our pulses
 leaps a flood from heroes' veins,
 Men who struck in flaming anger at
 the Southland's slaving chains."

Such poems as *Stay West*, *Young Man*, *My People*, and *The Prairie Sleeper* show that Kansas still has men and women who can toil patiently, endure hardships bravely, and still know the joy of living.

"Where'er I turn I touch a friendly hand,
 Frank eyes, and strong, clean faces are
 inclined me
 And I behold their smile and understand."

A poem entitled *Folks* interested me greatly. What one man is can often be told by what he thinks of other men. This poem shows the poet's trust in ordinary folk. The people of the spacious plains believe implicitly in their fellow-men. Yet they are not blind to the danger ever lurking near, for the poet turns from the East toward the West and cries:

"Out of America's sorrow, out of
 America's shame,
 Shape us, O God, the manhood that
 leaps like a living flame!"

Many of these *Sunflowers* speak of the youth of Kansas, of the fact that it is still "morning in Kansas." Perhaps Harry Kemp's poem *Kansas* best expresses this feeling:

"Let other countries glory in their past,
 But Kansas glories in her days to be,
 In her horizons limitless and vast,
 Her plains that storm the senses like the sea;
 She has no ruins gray that men revere—
 Her Time is Now, her Heritage is Here."

"And what," you ask, "does all this have to do with democracy?" It has everything to do with it. This love of the vast prairies, this strength and cleanliness of manhood, this forward-looking progressiveness are the very things of which democracy is made and by which it is upheld. No land, no people such as that of Kansas, could be downtrodden and oppressed. They must ever advance:

"For out on the Kansas prairies, in purity of sun,
 There are the great thoughts builded,
 visions of empires begun."

LILIAN DONALDSON
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